

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7711
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 1825

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM PINT ES
SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT: MARCH 1978

SUMMARY: MARCH WAS YET ANOTHER ACTIVE MONTH IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS
FIELD IN EL SALVADOR. FOLLOWING THE GOES SECURITY FORCES'
EFFECTIVE PREVENTION OF PROPOSED BPR DEMONSTRATION FEBRUARY 28
(SEE SAN SALVADOR 1004), THERE WAS
ALMOST NO OVERT ACTIVITY BY ANTI-GOES FORCES THROUGH THE TENSE PERIOD
CULMINATING WITH MARCH 12 ELECTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
AND MAYORS. ELECTIONS HELD WITH ONLY MINOR, ISOLATED INCIDENTS
FOR MANY OF WHICH EXTREMIST FPL GROUP CLAIMED CREDIT. MAJOR
POLITICAL OPPOSITION BOYCOTTED ELECTIONS AND EVEN GOES FIGURES
SHOW LIGHT TURNOUT.

HAVING WEATHERED FEB 28 AND MARCH 12 POTENTIAL CRISES PERIODS,
GOES MAY HAVE RELAXED GUARD AND TURNED TO MAJOR EL SALVADOR HOLIDAY
OF HOLY WEEK AND EASTER. THIS WAS SERIOUS MISTAKE SINCE SEMI-
SPONTANEOUS GATHERING OF CAMPESINOS SPONSORED BY POPULAR
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REVOLUTIONARY BLOC (BPR) LED TO CONFRONTATION WITH SECURITY FORCES
IN SAN SALVADOR MARCH 17 WITH AT LEAST EIGHT KNOWN KILLED
(INCLUDING ONE NATIONAL POLICE OFFICER) AND AS MANY AS THIRTY TO
FORTY WOUNDED. HOLY WEEK (MARCH 19-26) BROUGHT OPEN RURAL CONFLICT
BETWEEN CAMPESINOS SUPPORTING GOES, MOSTLY MEMBERS OF ORDEN AND
PARAMILITARY TERRITORIAL FORCES, AND CHURCH-SUPPORTED BPR AND ITS
COMPONENTS FECCAS AND UTC. DEATH TOLL UNKNOWN, BUT ESTIMATES VARY

FROM THIRTY TO 300, PLUS NUMEROUS WOUNDED AND ARRESTED. GOES SECURITY FORCES APPARENTLY EXERCISED RESTRAINT IN INITIAL CONFLICT, THEN MOVED IN TO SECURE AREA. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THIS CONFLICT, ANOTHER PRO-AND ANTI-GOES CAMPESINO CONFLICT BROKE OUT IN NEARBY AREA ADDING FURTHER TOLL OF DEAD, WOUNDED AND ARRESTED. TENSION IN RURAL AREAS APPEARS TO BE AT EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH LEVEL AND FURTHER OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE ARE ANTICIPATED. ARCHBISHOP ROMERO TOOK REASONABLY CAUTIOUS POSITION CONCERNING RURAL DISTURBANCES BUT CLEARLY AND PUBLICLY FAVORED BPR ANTI-GOES FORCES, FURTHER STRAINING CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS. URBAN LABOR SCENE QUIETER THAN IN RECENT MONTHS AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION CONFINED ITSELF TO PRESS CONFERENCES AND FAINT SUPPORT FOR RURAL OPPOSITION ACTION. END SUMMARY.

1. MARCH 12 ELECTIONS: BEST AND PERHAPS ONLY POSITIVE STATEMENT THAT CAN BE MADE FOR MARCH 12 ELECTIONS FOR 54 MEMBERS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND 261 MAYORS IS THAT IT WAS HELD WITH MINIMUM OF DISTURBANCES (SEE SAN SALVADOR 1223). GOES NATIONAL CONCILIATION PARTY (PCN) CRUSHED TOKEN OPPOSITION OF PPS, TAKING 50 OF 54 SEATS IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ALL 261 MAYORSHIPS. MUCH SPECULATION THAT PCN FINANCED PPS CAMPAIGN AND PROMISED THEM SOME REPRESENTATION TO ADD SLIGHT FORM OF LEGITIMACY TO ELECTION. TURNOUT RELATIVELY LIGHT, EVEN BY GOES COUNT, AND LEGITIMATE OPPOSITION (UNO COALITION) LATER CLAIMED THAT ACTUAL VOTER PARTICIPATION SLIGHTLY LESS THAN 20 PERCENT. IRONICALLY, EVEN TAME OPPOSITION CHARGED FRAUD IN SECEAL CONTESTS BUT THEIR PROTESTS HAVE BEEN DISCOUNTED OR CONFIDENTIAL

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IGNORED BY CENTRAL ELECTIONS COUNCIL. GOES FULFILLED CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATION TO HOLD ELECTIONS, BUT NO CHANGES NOTED IN ELECTORAL PROCESS THAT WOULD INDICATE MOVES BY GOES IN DIRECTION OF ENSURING OPEN AND HONEST ELECTIONS IN FUTURE. WHOLE PROCESS VIEWED BY GENERAL PUBLIC WITH SKEPTICISM AND APATHY. PRESIDENT ROMERO AND PCN REMAIN AT LEAST TECHNICALLY IN OFFICIAL CONTROL OF EVERY PART OF GOES MACHINERY.

2. GREATLY INCREASED ACTIVITY BY CHURCH-SUPPORTED ANTI-GOES RURAL GROUPS: AFTER SETBACKS SUFFERED BY ANTI-GOES FORCES AT ATTEMPTED FEBRUARY 28 DEMONSTRATION AND MARCH 12 ELECTIONS, RURAL OPPOSITION GROUP POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY BLOC (BPR) AND ITS TWO MAJOR COMPONENTS, CATHOLIC FEDERATION OF SALVADORAN CAMPESINOS (FECCAS) AND RURAL WORKERS UNION (UTC), SUDDENLY BECAME EXTREMELY ACTIVE IN LAST HALF

OF MARCH. FIRST CONFRONTATION TOOK PLACE MARCH 17 IN SAN SALVADOR WHEN BPR GROUP TRIED TO MOUNT DEMONSTRATION AND MARCH ON AGRICULTURAL BANK PROTESTING LENDING PRACTICES AND DEMANDING INCREASED BENEFITS FOR RURAL WORKERS. NATIONAL POLICE SENT FORCES TO STAGING AREA AND PRESUMABLY TRIED TO CONVINCE DEMONSTRATORS TO DEPART PEACEFULLY, SINCE THEY DID NOT HAVE PERMIT FOR SUCH GATHERING

AND WERE IN VIOLATION OF LAW OF PUBLIC ORDER. SHOOTING BROKE OUT (STILL UNCERTAIN WHO FIRED FIRST), ONE SENIOR POLICE OFFICIAL AND SEVERAL DEMONSTRATORS SERIOUSLY WOUNDED AND ONE ELEVEN-YEAR OLD BOY KILLED. POLICE CLAIMED THAT SOME OF GROUP ESCAPED IN BUS WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY INTERCEPTED AND ONE POLICE OFFICER AND AT LEAST FIVE PERSONS ON BUS KILLED. DUE TO LACK OF IMPARTIAL OR RELIABLE WITNESSES, DIFFICULT TO SAY WHICH SIDE ACTUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR INITIATING CONFLICT. CAN HOWEVER BE SAFELY STATED THAT NATIONAL POLICE PROBABLY OVER-REACTED TO REAL OR POTENTIAL THREAT POSED BY DEMONSTRATORS.

3. CONFRONTATIONS MOVED TO RURAL AREAS NEAR SAN SALVADOR (SAN PEDRO PERULAPAN) WEEK OF MARCH 20 (HOLY WEEK) WITH BLOODY ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN GOES SUPPORTING (ENJOYING QUASI-OFFICIAL STATUS) CONFIDENTIAL

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ORDEN AND OPPOSITION BPR/FECCAS/UTC GROUPS (SEE SAN SALVADOR 1446). ORIGINAL REPORTS RELEASED BY GOES PLACED ENTIRE BLAME ON INCIDENTS ON BPR "AGGRESSORS". MEDIA SATURATED WITH ACCOUNTS OF EVIL DEEDS OF BPR GROUPS AGAINST HUMBLE PEASANTS (ORDEN) IN AREA AND SECURITY FORCES EVENTUALLY SENT IN TO RESTORE ORDER. LATER ACCOUNTS BY CHURCH GROUPS, WHILE CAUTIOUS, INDICATED THAT REVERSE WAS TRUE: ORDEN FORCES MOVED IN ON BPR GROUPS AND MET WITH UNEXPECTED RESISTANCE. OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES JOINED IN LATER SUPPORT OF ANTI-GOES VERSION. WHILE BOTH SIDES STILL

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R 181411Z APR 78
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ATTEMPTING TO SELL THEIR RESPECTIVE VERSIONS, THERE IS INCREASING EVIDENCE THAT PRO-GOES FORCES MAY WELL HAVE INITIATED SMALL-SCALE OPERATION AGAINST ELEMENTS OF BPR/FECCAS/UTC WHICH SPARKED SERIOUS AND BLOODY CONFLICT. FEELINGS AND TENSIONS RUNNING VERY HIGH IN RURAL AREAS AMONG BOTH PRO- AND ANTI-GOES FORCES. WITH NO EASY SOLUTION TO UNDERLYING SOCIOECONOMIC CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN SIGHT, THERE IS WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT CONFRONTATION MAY WELL SPREAD TO OTHER AREAS OF EL SALVADOR. WHETHER THIS WOULD FORCE GOES TO UNDERTAKE LARGE-SCALE PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS IN RURAL AREAS OR LEAD THEM TO POLICE-MILITARY OPERATION DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE OPPOSITION REMAINS OPEN TO QUESTION. IN ANY EVENT, ROMERO GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE FACING ITS MOST SERIOUS THREAT IN RURAL AREAS IN ITS NINE MONTHS IN POWER.

4. CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS: EARLY IN MARCH THERE WERE SEVERAL INDICATIONS THAT ARCHBISHOP ROMERO AND PRESIDENT ROMERO WERE WILLING TO RESUME (OR BETTER STATED INITIATE) DIALOGUE IN SERIOUS, MEANINGFUL, HIGH-LEVEL FASHION. INCIDENTS SINCE MID-MARCH HAVE DEALT SEVERE SETBACK TO ANY SUCH DIALOGUE. GOES HAS PUBLICLY PLACED BPR/FECCAS/UTC GROUPS UNDER CHURCH INFLUENCE AND DIRECTION
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AND ACCUSED NUMBER OF PRIESTS OF OPENLY INCITING SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY. CHURCH HAS RESPONDED THAT GOES ISSUED INSTRUCTIONS TO ORDEN AND CONTINUES ITS OPEN OPPRESSION OF CAMPESINOS WHO ARE ONLY ASKING FOR DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING. UNITY OF CHURCH ALSO SHOWING WELL-PUBLICIZED SIGNS OF SPLIT AMONG THOSE IN HIERARCHY THAT SUPPORT ARCHBISHOP'S CLOSE ALLIANCE WITH BPR FORCES AND STRONG ANTI-GOES POSTURE AND THOSE WHO FEEL CHURCH IS BECOMING TOO DEEPLY INVOLVED IN AREA NOT WITHIN THEIR PURVIEW. ARCHBISHOP APPEARS TO CONTROL MAJORITY OF SUPPORT OF PRIESTS, BUT OPEN OPPOSITION IS DEVELOPING.

5. OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES: UNO COALITION CONTRIBUTED LITTLE TO ACTIVITIES OF MARCH. ITS THREE PARTIES ALL BOYCOTTED THE MARCH 12 ELECTIONS AND DID LITTLE MORE THAN TAKE MEDIA POTSHOTS AT GOES ELCTION PROCEDURES, CONDEMN LAW OF DEFENSE OF PUBLIC ORDER AND BLAME GOES FOR PROBLEMS IN RURAL AREAS. UNO APPARENTLY LOSING SUPPORTERS TO ACTIVITIST GROUPING SUCH AS BPR AND APPEARS DISORGANIZED AND INEFFECTIVE AT THIS POINT. LEADERS OF LARGEST OPPOSITION PARTY, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (PDC), ARE WELL AWARE OF WEAKENED POSITION AND ARE TALKING ABOUT REORGANIZATION (POSSIBLE SPLIT FROM UNO COALITION) AND REVITALIZATION OF PDC, BUT LITTLE ACTION IN THIS DIRECTION HAS BEEN MANIFEST.

6. LABOR DISTURBANCES: ON MARCH 10 THE WORKERS IN THE FACTORY INCA, LOCATED IN SANTA ANA, WENT ON SHORT-LIVED STRIKE TO SEEK REINSTATEMENT OF A WORKER FIRED FOR DISCIPLINARY REASONS. THE MARCH 15 EDITION OF THE OPPOSITION "LA CRONICA DEL PUEBLO" PUBLISHED ALLEGATIONS OF A WORKER, SALVADOR CASTELLANOS MURILLO, WHO SAID HE HAD BEEN BEATEN IN FRONT OF FELLOW WORKERS BY THE CUSTOMS POLICE OF ACAJUTLA. THE THREE-MAN ARBITRATION TRIBUNAL SET UP BY GOES TO SETTLE DISPUTE BETWEEN FESINCONSTRANS (HEADED BY SECRETARY-GENERAL FELIPE ZALDIVAR) AND THE CON-

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STRUCTION INDUSTRY (SEE SAN SALVADOR 701) HANDED DOWN A DECISION THAT TOOK EFFECT ON MARCH 17. ZALDIVAR SAID DECISION WAS AN "ACCEPTABLE BUT NOT AN EXCELLENT" ONE.

7. CHRONOLOGY OF OPPOSITION, TERRORIST AND SECURITY FORCES ACTIVITIES:

MARCH 1 - THE NATIONAL GUARD ALLEGED THAT FIVE OF THE PEOPLE CAPTURED IN CONNECTION WITH DEMONSTRATION ANNOUNCED FOR FEBRUARY 28 WERE MEMBERS OF THE FPL. THE FIVE DENIED THE CHARGES. ON MARCH 2 THE TREASURY POLICE ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAD CAPTURED FIVE ADDITIONAL MEMBERS OF FPL FOR SEEKING TO PARTICIPATE IN FEBRUARY 28 DEMONSTRATION. THE TEN WERE TURNED OVER TO COURTS CHARGED WITH VIOLATING LAW OF PUBLIC ORDER. TWO WERE RELEASED BY CRIMINAL COURT OF SAN SALVADOR, WHICH DECREED THEN CONTINUED DETENTION OF THE OTHER EIGHT.

MARCH 5 - THE NATIONAL POLICE REPORTED THAT A BOMB (ALLEGEDLY PLANTED BY FPL) EXPLODED IN CITY OF CHALCHUAPA, SCATTERING LEAFLETS ASKING PEOPLE NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN MARCH 12 ELECTIONS.

MARCH 7 - TWO AGENTS OF THE NATIONAL POLICE, ACCUSED OF KILLING A BUS DRIVER IN CUSCATANCINGO, WERE ARRESTED BY SECURITY FORCES. THE VICTIM, JOSE OSCAR MACHON RIVAS, APPARENTLY REFUSED TO LET THE POLICEMEN BOARD HIS BUS BECAUSE THERE WERE DRUNK.

MARCH 7 - MORE THAN THIRTY PERSONS REPORTEDLY OPENED FIRE ON A BUS NEAR LAS VUELTAS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHALATENANGA, AND WOUNDED THREE AGENTS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD WHO WERE ESCORTING TWO PRISONERS ACCUSED OF SUBVERSION. THE ATTACKERS SUCCEEDED IN FREEING THE PRISONERS.

MARCH 7 - UNKNOWN PERSONS MACHINEGUNNED THE HOUSE IN CINQUERA (DEPARTMENT OF CABANAS) OF THE LOCAL SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE PCN. A SIMILAR INCIDENT OCCURRED IN THE SAME AREA AT

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THE HOUSE OF THE LOCAL PCN SECRETARY-GENERAL IN THE CANTON OF EL TULE. NO ONE WAS HURT IN THE ATTACKS, WHICH ARE BLAMED BY THE SECURITY FORCES ON FECCAS AND THE UTC.

MARCH 8 - AT 4:30 A.M., FOUR PEOPLE ARMED WITH .45-CALIBER PISTOLS REPORTEDLY FIRED ON A GROUP OF AGENTS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD IN THE CITY OF SAN MIGUEL. ONE OF THE ALLEGED ATTACKERS, EDUARDO SANCHEZ HERNANDEZ, WAS KILLED WHILE THE OTHERS FLED.

MARCH 9 - THE BUILDING HOUSING THE MAYORALITY AND MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION OF EL PAISNAL (DEPARTMENT OF SAN SALVADOR) WAS SET ON FIRE BY A GROUP OF "TERRORISTS" AND ALMOST TOTALLY DESTROYED. CARLOS AGUILAR DURAN, WHO REPORTEDLY ADMITTED TO BEING A MEMBER OF THE FPL, AND NINE OTHERS WERE TURNED OVER TO THE COURTS ON MARCH 15 AS BEING THE ALLEGED PERPETRATORS.

MARCH 10 - BOMBS PLANTED BY UNKNOWN PERSON WENT OFF AT APPROXIMATELY 4:00 A.M. IN THE BUILDING HOUSING THE DEPARTMENTAL GOVERNMENT IN SANTA ANA, CAUSING EXTENSIVE DAMAGE.

MARCH 10 - IN A TALK BEFORE A GROUP OF BUSINESSMEN, PRESIDENT ROMERO STATED THAT THERE WAS "SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE" INDICATING THAT THE RECENT SPATE OF FIRES IN THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT OF SAN SALVADOR WAS DUE TO "SUBVERSIVE FORCES".

MARCH 11 - ALLEGED TERRORISTS COMMITTED ACTS OF VANDALISM AGAINST THE BUILDINGS HOUSING THE MAYORALITIES OF SAN JOSE VERAPAZ AND SAN LORENZO, BOTH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SAN VICENTE.

MARCH 11 - TWO BOMBS, PRESUMABLY PLANTED BY SUBVERSIVE GROUPS, EXPLODED IN CITY OF SAN VICENTE.
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MARCH 13 - THE NATIONAL POLICE ANNOUNCED THE CAPTURE OF JOSE ANTONIO MARIN CASTRO, JESUS ESTRADA DIAZ, JOSE FERMIN DOMINGUEZ, AND CUENGUNDA PENA BONILLA, ALL ALLEGEDLY MEMBER OF THE BPR. THEY WERE ALLEGEDLY ARRESTED IN COLONA LAS PALMAS WHILE IN THE ACT OF MANUFACTURING EXPLOSIVES.

MARCH 15 - THE NATIONAL GUARD TURNED OVER TO THE COURTS LISANDRO HERNANDEZ VELASQUEZ, AN ALLEGED MEMBER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY OF THE PEOPLE (ERP), CAUGHT ON MARCH 10 WHILE ALLEGEDLY PLANTING A BOMB.

MARCH 16 - THE SUPREME COURT ORDERED THE RELEASE OF TWO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, FEDERICO JOSA MEJIA AND RENE ADOLFO JOSA MEJIA, WHO HAD BEEN DETAINED SINCE JANUARY UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE LAW OF PUBLIC ORDER.

MARCH 16 - THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED NATIONALIST DEMOCRATIC UNION (UDN) DENOUNCED THE ARREST ON MARCH 12 BY THE NATIONAL POLICE OF ONE OF ITS MEMBERS, CARLOS VASQUEZ SILVA, A MEMBER OF THE PARTY DIRECTORATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF AHUACHAPAN. A PRESS REPORTED STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN TURNED OVER TO COURTS FOR POSSESSION OF SUBVERSIVE LITERATURE.

MARCH 17 - THE ERP, IN A COMMUNIQUE SENT TO A LOCAL PAPER, TOOK THE CREDIT FOR THE PLANTING OF TWENTY BOMBS (WHICH ON DETONATING, SCATTERED PROPAGANDA LEAFLETS) IN SAN SALVADOR.

MARCH 19 - THE SECURITY FORCES IN SAN MIGUEL, ACTING ON THE BASIS OF THE LAW OF PUBLIC ORDER, PREVENTED "ANDES 21 DE JUNIO" FROM HOLDING A PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION TO PROTEST THE ACTIONS OF THE SECURITY FORCES AGAINST THE BPR ON MARCH 17 IN SAN SALVADOR.

MARCH 28 - CARMEN CALDERON ACOSTA AND CRUZ GRANDE TEJADA, CONFIDENTIAL

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BOTH REPORTEDLY MEMBERS OF FECCAS, WERE ARRESTED IN TACACHICO FOR DISSEMINATING BPR PROPAGANDA.

MARCH 29 - THE FPL TOOK CREDIT FOR THE BOMBING OF THE SANTA ANA RESIDENCE OF ERNESTO SALGADO MATHIES, MAYOR-ELECT OF SANTA ANA. THE EXPLOSION CAUSED EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO THE GARAGE AND TWO AUTOMOBILES.

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